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Opening Statement of the Honorable **Ted Poe (R-TX), Chairman**
Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade Hearing:
“Countering Iranian Proxies in Iraq”
September 26, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

“For years now, Iran has gone unchecked as it expanded its influence and recruited legions of murdering proxies across the Middle East. Lavishly funded by sanctions relief under the Iran nuclear deal, a network of terrorist criminals sow chaos and conflict in Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, Lebanon, and Iraq. Their objective: to expel U.S. influence from the region conquer our allies subjugate millions and establish the theocratic regime in Tehran as the undisputed master of the Middle East.

One of the central fronts in Iran’s effort to conquer the region is in Iraq. Make no mistake, Iran wants to make Iraq a puppet state of Iran. Exploiting Iraq’s weak government and the fight against ISIS, Iran has mobilized thousands of militiamen and political proxies to gain power in Baghdad. They are using their growing influence in Iraq to foster sectarianism secure a supply-line to terrorists in Syria and Lebanon, and recruit fighters for their many wars.

Iran is not interested in building a strong and sovereign Iraq. Iran is not interested in a peaceful Iraqi society where Sunnis, Shiites, Christians, or Kurds live in harmony together. As America and our allies have come to help fight ISIS and restore Iraq’s legitimate authority over its territory, Iran has been working to undermine our hard-won victory and threaten our soldiers and diplomats.

In May, Iraq held its first elections since the defeat of the ISIS caliphate. But many Iraqis did not bother to vote, because they saw the system as corrupt. Like the Iranian people, they see the hand of Iran’s oppressive regime undermining the institutions in Iraq. They see Iran’s proxies, men who swear allegiance to the Supreme Leader in Tehran, running for office in their country. They see the vast wealth of their nation being squandered to pay for Iran’s militias while they live in poverty, without clean water or electricity.

The Iraqi people are now in the streets demanding a change. They do not like the direction their nation is going and the heavy influence of Iran in their politics. We should not either.

Men that ordered the murder of Americans only a decade ago, are gaining a foothold in Iraq’s new government. And what have we done to stop them?

These Iranian-supported terrorists turned politicians regularly threaten Americans and our allies while their militias have committed countless atrocities across Iraq and Syria. For years they have murdered their own countrymen and have forced thousands from their homes. Meanwhile, our government has sought to appease Iran’s proxies in Iraq.

Despite the President's clear direction to counter Iran's expansionism across the Middle East, our State Department has shielded these murderers from any punishment. They say, now is not the time, we could upset the status quo. We are allowing fear to get the better of us.

That is why I introduced H.R. 4238, the Iranian Proxies Terrorist Sanctions Act a year ago.

This bill would target two Iraqi militias, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) and Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (HHN). These terrorists answer directly to Iran and have the blood of innocent Americans, Iraqis, Syrians, and Kurds on their hands. For some inexplicable reason, we have refrained from targeting these groups despite their countless evil acts. Our inaction has allowed these terrorists to gain more and more power in Iraq.

As is usually the case in Washington, 'analysis paralysis' set in. The 'experts' now say Congress should not be mandating sanctions and we should pass the buck to the executive branch. We as representatives of Americans killed by these groups should not stand idly by.

My staff was in Baghdad last month and the Embassy staff scoffed at my legislation, saying sanctions would provoke these terrorist militias. Well just weeks later, these groups launched a mortar attack against the US embassy in Baghdad.

Another argument we now hear is that while Iraqi government formation is underway, it is not the right time to sanction these groups. But will conditions for designation be any better once these thugs hold key government positions? This is just a stalling technique of government bureaucrats who have a long track record of inaction on this issue. There will simply never be a perfect time to sanction these groups.

While we do nothing, Iran is doing everything. They are expending all their efforts to consolidate their power in Baghdad. And it's paying off. Decisive action must be taken now. Americans are tired of investing blood and treasure in Iraq as Iran seizes more power. If Iraq is ever going to become a strong and independent nation, we must take a clear stand against the Iranian proxies in that nation. And that's just the way it is."